

# The Artistic Characteristics of Carving and Decoration of Shanshan Guild Hall

Xinghan Wang<sup>1,\*</sup>, Na Zhou<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Jinan University, Jinan City, China

<sup>2</sup>School of Jinan University, Jinan City, China

\*Corresponding author e-mail:1113782912@qq.com

**Abstract.** With the acceleration of urban modernization in China, many historical and cultural relics are facing new challenges. The protection of ancient architecture and culture has become a very important issue in the current urban construction process. The symposium on the research project of the Grand Canal Cultural Heritage Protection Regulations in 2022 was held in Liao Cheng. As an important part of the canal culture, the Shanshan Guild Hall is an indispensable key link in the inheritance of the Grand Canal culture. The artistic style, many carving techniques and cultural connotations expressed by it have important historical, cultural and artistic research valued for us. Taking the traditional carving of the Shanshan Guild Hall as the starting point, this paper digs deep into the rich connotation brought by the culture of the Grand Canal from the aspects of carving type, decorative style and theme content, discusses the characteristics of traditional architectural decorative art, and inherits and develops it.

**Keywords:** component; Shanshan Guild Hall; decoration art; Cultural connotations

## 1. Overview of Liao Cheng Shanshan Guild Hall

The "Shanshan Guild Hall" building complex is compact in layout, well-proportioned, well-connected, and luxuriously decorated. It can be called a masterpiece of ancient Chinese architecture. The wood carving, stone carving and brick carving are the fine works of Chinese architectural art, and its architectural style of Shanxi is fully publicized. In addition to the cultural customs, ideology, and architectural norms of Shanxi and Shaanxi, they are also influenced and infiltrated by the regional culture and customs of Liao Cheng. The decoration features and cultural connotations of the hall building are extremely rich [1].

### 1.1 Introduction to the building of Shanshan Guild Hall

Liao Cheng Shanshan Guild Hall is located in the south of the city and on the west bank of the canal (Figure 1). It is the epitome and witness of the commercial prosperity of Liao Cheng in the Qing Dynasty. The Guild Hall was built in the eighth year of Emperor Qianlong's reign in the Qing Dynasty (1743 AD) and took 66 years to complete. It was built by merchants from Shanxi and Shaanxi for the purpose of "worshipping the gods and connecting mulberries". The whole building includes the front door, the stage, the stage-attached buildings, the drum tower and the bell tower, the appendices, the stone tablets, the three big halls, Spring-Autumn Pavilion and so on (Figure 2). Shanshan Guild Hall was listed as a provincial key cultural relics protection unit by the Shandong Provincial People's Government in 1977, and was listed as a national key cultural relics protection unit by the State Council in 1988 [2].

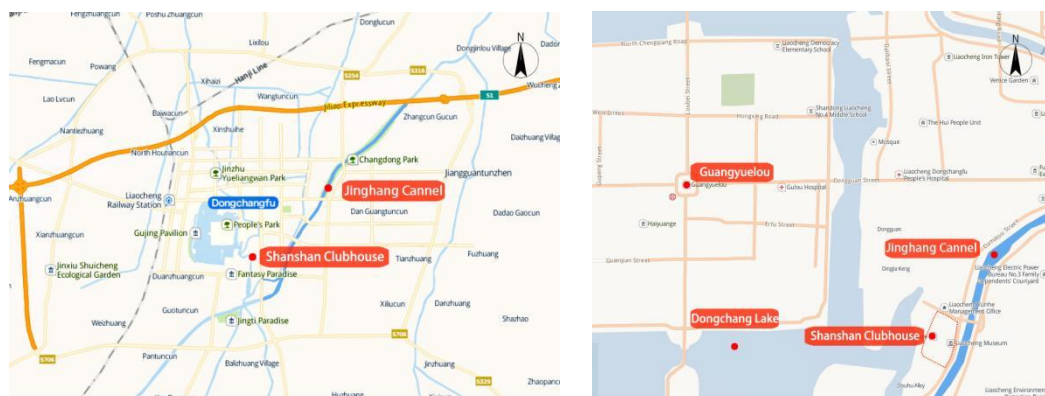


Figure 1. Geographical location of Shanshan Guild Hall

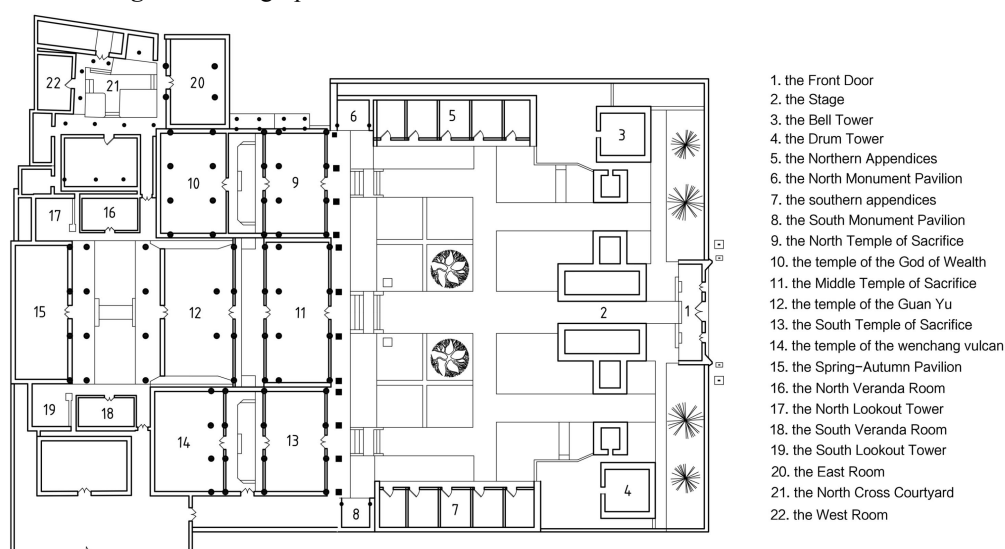


Figure 2. General plan of Shanshan Guild Hall

Liaocheng Shanshan Guild Hall, sitting in the east and facing the west, is a Qing Dynasty building complex integrating sacrifice and guild hall, witnessing the prosperous history of the ancient city of Canal. As a product of the canal culture, the Guild Hall presents a unique architectural decoration style. Its Art Deco style not only has the delicate and gorgeous decoration of the palace building, but also the simple and concise decoration of the residential building, and shows the various regional characteristics to the fullest. This beautifully decorated building adopts the traditional palace-style architectural layout, which is unfolded along the axis in the depth direction, having rich cultural connotation.

From the mountain gate to the Spring-Autumn Pavilion, the three connected courtyards gradually increase in height. The buildings are interconnected with each other. The whole project features compact layout, ingenious design, carved beams and painted rafters, all looking splendid in green and gold; the art of the temple beats nature, and the temple is a masterpiece of traditional Chinese ancient architecture [3].

## 1.2 The architectural decoration of Liaocheng Shanshan Guild Hall

The architectural decoration of the Liaocheng Shanshan Guild Hall combines the palace decoration style with the folk decoration techniques, and at the same time absorbs the decorative characteristics of the north and south folk architecture, creating the unique charm of the Liaocheng Shan Shan Guild Hall. Especially the "three carvings" in the decoration of traditional ancient buildings (wood carving, stone carving and brick carving) are the main parts of the building

decoration of the guild hall. They can be seen everywhere in the guild hall. The craftsmanship called a masterpiece in art is exquisite and rare in China.

## **2. Various carvings in Shanshan Guild Hall**

Liaocheng Shanshan Guild Hall is a large-scale brick and wood structure building complex, which is the master of "slender and dense" in the Qing Dynasty. The wood carvings, stone carvings and brick carvings of the building are decorated with brackets, sparrow brace, column bases and other aspects. Fine wood carvings, dignified stone carvings, and elegant brick carvings are splendid in the various components of the hall building.

### **2.1 Exquisite and luxurious wood carving decoration**

The simple and easy-to-process characteristics of wood make it a widely used decorative material for ancient buildings in my country. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the development of wood carving art reached its peak, and "carved beams and painted ridges" became synonymous and aesthetic characteristics to describe the exquisite and luxurious traditional wooden buildings. Liaocheng Shanshan Guild Hall's woodcarving decorations appear in large numbers in architraves, beams and columns, doors and windows, and caissons. Under the influence of canal culture, these woodcarvings show their special artistic charm through unique themes.

In terms of expression, the woodcarving themes of Shanshan Guild Hall are mainly based on humanistic stories and flower patterns with auspicious meanings. Stories such as "Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea", "Picture of Filial Piety" and "The Legend of Immortals" fully reflect the integration of traditional Chinese culture and architectural art. These themes are matched with auxiliary patterns such as flowers and birds, landscapes, etc. to form a woodcarving art with rigorous and orderly composition and rich content. The ancient and superb carving skills are fully displayed in the luxurious decoration of the hall, which makes the traditional Chinese carving art reflect the infinite artistic charm in a limited space [4].

#### **2.1.1. Wood carvings in the temple of GuanYu**

The three wooden openwork foreheads inlaid on the top of the eaves of the temple of GuanYu are the finest woodcarvings in the museum and can be called the "treasure of the town hall". These three architraves are all carved from a whole piece of wood. The simultaneous use of a variety of carving techniques enriches the level of the picture and enhances the three-dimensional sense of the wood carving, making the entire wood carving picture lifelike and vivid (Figure3~5).



**Figure 3.** Southern wood carving for "Twenty-Four Filial Pieties".It expresses the idea that Shanxi merchants abide by the "filial piety" used to attract wealth and treasure.



**Figure 4.** The middle forehead is carved with eight immortals.Wood carving decoration uses such mythological stories to highlight the functional characteristics of the Guandi Grand Hall.



**Figure 5.** The northern forehead is carved with stories of "Immortal Legend", such as "Rotten Ke Mountain" and "Tiantai Mountain", expressing people's yearning for a better life.

## 2.2 Finely crafted stone decoration

With its sturdy properties, stone is usually used in the exterior space of buildings, building bases and load-bearing components. Its round and thick shape and hard and cold texture form a resolute, cool and magnificent decorative language. The stone carving decoration in Shanshan Guild Hall draws on the essence of stone carving skills from all over the country, and as the main architectural decoration, it appears in a large number of exterior walls, column bases, railings and plaques, etc. The characteristic decorative form has high aesthetic and artistic value.





Most of the traditional Chinese buildings have the characteristics of huge volume and grandeur, so as to show the rank and status of the users. Shanshan Guild Hall is a building complex with a commercial nature. In order to show their strength, businessmen have broadened their business routes and carried out commercial activities. They have decorated the entire hall with exquisite stone carvings. At the same time, the stone carvings in the guild hall are also very rich in themes, covering plants, animals, characters, myths and legends, historical stories, etc. These stone carvings present a gorgeous decorative art feature.

### 2.2.1. Stone carvings of columns and balustrades

The front of the columns of the front porch of the three halls is carved with couplets, and the other surfaces of the rows of pillars are carved with decorative patterns of dragons, auspicious clouds and flowers. The carving techniques are similar to the relief dragon pillars in the Confucius Temple in Qufu. Through the reasonable use of different stone textures by craftsmen, the stone carving works are very exquisite and vivid, quite folk characteristics, and full of life interest.

Craftsmen and artists give different themes and contents of different stone materials through the modeling method according to their aptitude (Table1), and the proper and reasonable use of texture helps to reflect the connotation of sculpture works.

**Table1.** Stone carvings of balustrades

Type	Apply the legend	Content	Implied meaning
Stone carvings of balustrades		Send a picture of the boy who sent money	It represents luck, has the meaning of wealth, blessing and peace, and expresses the expectation of a better life
		scendants continuously	The auspicious meaning of the vines winding, coiling and long, the descendants multiplying, and the continuous continuation.
		Years of cold three friends figure	The three friends of the year are pine, bamboo and plum. It represents high moral character and indomitable integrity.
		Deer crane with spring map	It praises the beautiful scene of spring full of dryness, the moisture of all things and the otherworldly, different flows, purity and elegance.

## 2.3 Simple and elegant brick decoration

Bricks are widely used materials in traditional Chinese architecture, and the brick carvings formed by delicate carvings have become one of the main forms of architectural decoration in China. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the art of brick carving was very mature. The brick carvings of the Shanshan Guild Hall were widely used and combined with various building components, making it both decorative and the main body of the building, becoming a unique style in the building, with decorative form.

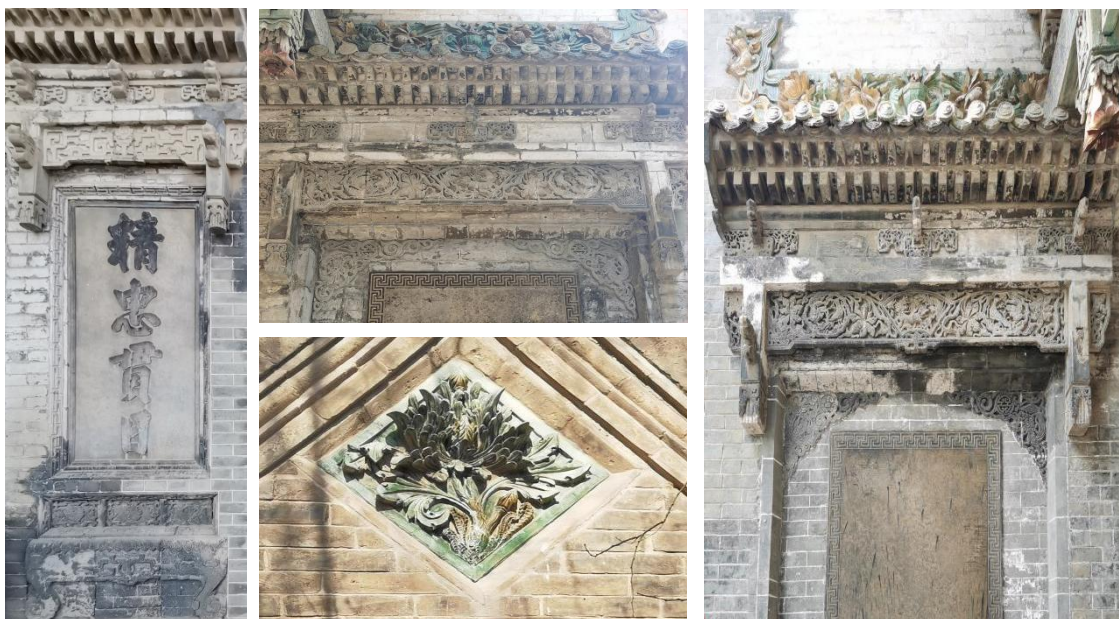
The brick carvings in the guild hall are mostly distributed on the gatehouse, the screen wall and the column base. The pattern content is mainly auspicious flowers and plants. At the same time, the brick carvings in the guild hall use a variety of carving techniques to show the exquisite atmosphere, which complements the surrounding wood carvings and stone carvings each other. Although the brick carvings in the guild hall are slightly inferior to wood carvings and stone carvings in terms of volume, quantity and exquisiteness, they are an indispensable finishing touch in the entire building complex, showing the strong characteristics of the times to a large extent and local colors.

### 2.3.1. Brick carvings of screen walls and column bases

The column bases of the three halls are carved with flower and wealth vases by simple line carving techniques. The picture is exquisite and elegant, which is integrated with the entire hall building.



Most of the brick carvings of the guild hall are inlaid on the gatehouse, screen walls, and column bases. The large blocks of blue bricks are carved with vivid characters, insects, fish, flowers and birds, as well as eight treasures, Bogu and geometric patterns, which are very decorative (Figure7).



**Figure7.** Brick carvings of screen walls and wall space

### 3. Conclusion

With the development and progress of society, the living space of traditional carvings is shrinking day by day. We should strengthen the protection of architectural integrity and architectural decorative arts, and appear in a new attitude to better innovate our contemporary architectural decorative arts.

As a solidified art, Shanshan Guild Hall is an indispensable part of urban culture. It records the history of Liaocheng as the commercial center of the canal, and also shows the commercial culture to the world, which is a gorgeous flower in ancient folk architecture. As an excellent craft in ancient architecture in China, the art of carving has its own unique advantages. Therefore, it is necessary to correctly understand the value of traditional art of carving art, inherit the tradition and do a good job of innovation according to the development trend of contemporary architecture and landscape, so as to make the art of carving to have a long history. The architectural art of Shanshan Guild Hall provides traditional cultural symbols that can be refined for modern decoration, adding modern language and using modern technology and can be applied to various fields such as interior design, architectural design, graphic design, etc., taking the essence and removing the dross. On the basis of traditional culture, the design style of the nationality is formed, so that the traditional architectural culture can blossom and bear fruit in the new era [5].

Through the investigation and research on the architectural decoration art of the Shanshan Guild Hall in Liaocheng, the art form and current situation of traditional architecture are deeply analyzed, so as to better protect and innovate the current architectural decorative art. We should base our national and cultural foundations, and learn from a wide range of innovations, only in this way can design have vitality and be integrated into contemporary decorative design.

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